

Tomorrow's Vacancies, Today's Priority

An Overview of the Michigan Family Independence Agency Centrally Coordinated Hiring Pool

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**Annie E. Casey Foundation
Human Services Workforce Initiative**

This report was made possible by a grant from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Human Services Workforce Initiative.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Human Services Workforce Initiative is the first national effort to address the critical condition of the nation's human services workforce – one that helps care for America's most disadvantaged children and families. The Initiative highlights the urgent need to recruit and retain human services workers who have the appropriate training and support to most effectively do their jobs. Through its extensive experience in the field, the Casey Foundation has found that a stable, prepared and motivated human services workforce yields real reform and better results for children and families.

I. Introduction

Public human services agencies across the country struggle to provide quality service to their clients with a workforce plagued by high turnover, low wages, huge workloads and limited professional development opportunities. A major factor in the human services profession's losing battle to recruit, retain, motivate and reward its workforce is the often outmoded and ineffective human resources management (HRM) function found in many public agencies.

Within the past few years, there has been a growing awareness of the critical role HRM must play if public agencies are to address the problems facing their human services workforce. In some jurisdictions, the HRM function has taken on a strategic role, and agencies have implemented a number of innovative programs in an attempt to make the HRM function more flexible, responsive and supportive.

One such program is the State of Michigan's Family Independence Agency (FIA)ⁱ Centrally Coordinated Hiring Pool (CCHP). Under this innovative hiring model, FIA was able to:

- Reduce the number of caseworker vacancies.
- Reduce the length of time caseworker vacancies remain open.
- Improve the overall quality of their children's services workers.
- Save money in the hiring process.

In 2002, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, in partnership with CPS Human Resource Services, assessed the impact that the CCHP model has had on FIA's hiring of children's services workers.

The FIA's experience provides an excellent model for agencies seeking to improve their child welfare workforce, particularly with respect to reducing the number and length of caseworker vacancies. Public human services agencies could utilize some or all of the CCHP model, along with other HRM best practices implemented by the FIA.

II. Agency Profile

The Family Independence Agency is Michigan's public assistance, child and family welfare agency. FIA directly administers programs through a network of over 100 county department of human services offices around the state. The FIA administers the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families grant and the Food Assistance program, along with a number of other financial assistance and social services programs. The FIA has:

Employees: At the time of our study, about 10,500, one-third located in Wayne County (Detroit area). Of those, about 1,600 are Children's Protective Services or Foster Care workers.

Offices: At the time of our study, about 130, ranging from around 20 employees to several hundred in the Lansing Central Office

Appropriations: In FY04 \$3.9B

III. The CCHP Model

In January 1999, the FIA implemented its new approach to hiring children's services workers called the Centrally Coordinated Hiring Pool (CCHP) process. The new process centralized the FIA's recruiting and training efforts for nearly all Michigan counties. The objective of CCHP was to reduce substantially the vacancy rate of Children's Protective Services and Foster Care workers and the length of time jobs remained vacant, and to improve the quality of newly hired workers.

Michigan's innovative approach involves hiring new workers in anticipation of vacancies expected to occur weeks into the future. Hiring and training new workers weeks before the vacancies occur results in jobs being filled almost as soon as they become available. In essence, Michigan wanted a "just-in-time" inventory of new employees so that the children they served would receive services promptly.

Previous to CCHP implementation, most children's services vacancies remained open for up to 16 weeks, including eight weeks of training before new workers could carry a caseload. Each county office interviewed and hired all of their children's services workers from candidate lists created by the Michigan Department of Civil Service. The hiring process did not begin until after a vacancy had occurred.

Under the CCHP model, the FIA projects hiring needs two to four months out and uses a centralized process to hire employees to fill the expected vacancies. The CCHP process relies on continuous online recruiting and interviewing. A group of experienced child welfare supervisors comes to a central location to interview all candidates, rather than each supervisor interviewing only those candidates applying for jobs in their county office. Rather than being hired for a specific vacancy in a given location, new employees are hired based on where the Office of Human Resources (OHR) predicted vacancies would occur in several weeks.

Job candidates are encouraged to make themselves available for several different work locations. New employees are hired and sent to training so that when a vacancy does arise, a trained employee is either available or soon-to-be available. Although newly hired employees usually do not know initially where they will be assigned after completing training, they do know they will be assigned to a location in which they have agreed to work. Under the CCHP model, vacancies are usually filled with trained employees within two weeks.

IV. FIA HRM Best Practices

Although the "advance hiring" aspect of the FIA's initiative is perhaps the most unique element of the CCHP, it includes other features that are also best practices, in and of themselves. As part of the CCHP design, the FIA also made the following changes:

- **Online Recruiting:** FIA now uses the Internet as the primary recruitment tool. Civil service rule changes that eliminated requirements for written testing allows the FIA to recruit applicants in real time rather than rely on often outdated candidate lists.
- **Behavioral Interviews:** FIA replaced the previous traditional interview format with competency-based behavioral interviews. FIA first validated the competencies for children's services jobs that are associated with, and predictive of, superior job performance. They then adopted a behavioral interview approach that requires applicants to provide detailed examples of their experience in the specific competency areas.
- **Skill Validation:** As part of the interview process, all applicants are required to compose a short letter at a computer work station. In addition to establishing basic computer literacy, the primary purpose of the exercise is to obtain a sample of the applicant's writing skills.
- **Comprehensive Background Checks:** FIA replaced the previous "hit-or-miss" approach to background checks with a thorough procedure. After the written exercise and behavioral interview, OHR conducts telephone reference checks on all considered candidates. FIA also completes a thorough review of criminal histories, driver's license records, and the state's child abuse and neglect system. OHR makes conditional offers of employment, subject to the applicant's ability to pass the drug and alcohol screening process.

V. CCHP Impact

- The CCHP process has had a dramatic impact on the vacancy rate in the FIA Children's Protective Services and Foster Care programs, reducing the average vacancy rate from 9.3 percent during the two-year period preceding CCHP implementation to 3.2 percent during the five years following implementation.
- Between 1997 (two years before the CCHP process) and 2004 (five years after its introduction) the percentage of racial and ethnic minorities increased by more than one-third, from 26.5 percent to 35.4 percent of employees in the FIA's Services Specialist classification.
- In our sample, the average of the performance evaluation scores of the CCHP group was higher than the average of the scores of the traditionally-hired group on each of the measured competency areas.
- In a comparison of worker timeliness in initiating and completing investigations of child abuse and neglect, the CCHP group performed better on all timeliness measures.
- FIA employees hired subsequent to the CCHP reported being generally very well satisfied with the hiring process and that they were a "good fit" for their jobs.
- When compared with a control group, FIA supervisors reported having more confidence in the qualifications of their new hires, seeing greater improvement in the quality of new employees hired over the past five years, and being more satisfied with the agency's procedures for recruiting, screening, and hiring.

- Once the CCHP was fully implemented, departure rates of Services Specialists within the first 30 months after hire decreased 27 percent as compared to rates before implementation.

Percentage Departure Rates in the First 30 Months of Employment for FIA Services Specialists

Period	Date of Hire Range	Percentage Departure Rate
Period 1: Prior to CCHP implementation	1/1/1998 – 12/31/1998	24.5
Period 2: Post-CCHP implementation but prior to use of behavioral interviews	3/26/2001 – 12/31/2001	21.3
Period 3: Post-CCHP implementation and with use of behavioral interviews	1/1/2002 – 5/31/2002	17.9

- Hiring children's services workers through the CCHP process provides the FIA an annual savings in recruitment and selection costs of between \$50,000 and \$60,000 per year.

VI. Conclusions

For public human services agencies looking for innovative HRM strategies to improve client service and outcomes, the Family Independence Agency CCHP model provides an instructive case study. While human services professionals across the country struggle with extra caseloads resulting from caseworker vacancies, the CCHP process is an effective solution for dramatically reducing vacancy rates by filling jobs quickly.

Any large human services agency could effectively utilize some or all of the CCHP process. The most unique aspect of the CCHP is the element of “advance hiring.” In order to benefit from projecting vacancies several weeks in advance, an organization must be large enough to have somewhat predictable turnover. Although the FIA is a statewide organization, the process of advance hiring could as easily work in a large county or city human services agency.

The CCHP program is a multifaceted process that consists of several best practice components. These include online recruiting, behavioral interviewing, competency validation for child welfare positions, and a thorough background and

reference check process. A human services organization of any size could utilize any of these best practice components.

VII. Further Reading

For an in-dept analysis of the CCHP model and its effects, see the following reports produced by CPS Human Resource Services:

Tomorrow’s Vacancies, Today’s Priority: Michigan Family Independence Agency’s Centrally Coordinated Hiring Pool Summary Report.

Tomorrow’s Vacancies, Today’s Priority: Michigan Family Independence Agency’s centrally Coordinated Hiring Pool How-To Guide.

The Impact of the Centrally Coordinated Hiring Pool: A Historical Review.

Best Practices Evaluation for the Annie E. Casey Foundation: Technical Report.

Also see the Michigan Department of Human Resources website at <http://www.mi.gov/dhs>

ⁱ In 2004, the Family Independence Agency was renamed the Department of Human Services (DHS).